CHAPTER TEN

NATIONALISM AND CONFESSIONALISM: SHIʿIS, DRUZES AND ALAWIS IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

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Introduction

Comprising more than twenty religious and ethnic groups, the modern states of Syria and Lebanon face the overriding problem of regulating confessional and ethnic conflicts.[1] The Syrian and Lebanese ruling elites have strongly emphasized the importance of 'national unity' against internal and external threats. Despite the call for unity, an implicit and explicit confessional competition has endured, inducing the leaders of most of the religious communities to jockey for securing slices of power.

Although the question of power and powerlessness in Syria and Lebanon is related to economic, social, constitutional and cultural aspects, the present chapter investigates this question through the prism of the nationalist discourse adopted by intellectuals and politicians of the Shiʿis, Druzes and Alawis. The article focuses on this discourse during the period of the Arab *Nahda* (the Arab awakening) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and its implication on ethno-politics within the two states.

Perhaps the distinction drawn by some scholars between the 'Jacobinistic' and 'syncretistic' types of state nationalism would provide clues for understanding the ways in which the ruling elites in Syria and Lebanon have regulated the confessional cleavages (Hanf 1993: 28–37). Jacobinism and syncretism have become two models of nationalism for Syria and Lebanon since their independence in 1940s. However, Syrian Jacobinism and Lebanese syncretism have their origin in the late Ottoman period and before the creation of the two States in the 1920s. From 1908 to 1920, the Arab nationalist discourse advocated an integration of the religious

[1] The terms "confessional" and "confessionalism" are used here as translation of the Arabic terms *taʾifi* and *taʾifiyya* that refer to collective identities rather than to religious doctrines and tenets (*madhhab*).

communities in one and indivisible nation, not only in social and political domains but also in the cultural one, rather similar to the Jacobinistic type of nation and nationalism based on the principle of equality. In the same period, Maronite intellectuals and politicians developed their own nationalist discourse that called for the creation of a separate Lebanese nation that recognizes confessional diversity.

Since 1946, the successive regimes in Syria have adopted the Jacobinistic type of nationalism. In 1960s, this nationalism helped military officers from the Alawi, Druze and Isma'ili minority groups to assume control of the state institutions, paving the road for Hafiz al-Asad, the powerful Alawi officer, to takeover in 1970. To avoid the image of a minority regime and the symbolic deprivation of the Sunni majority, and in the hope of minimizing the latter's opposition, Hafiz al-Asad's regime strongly emphasized the Jacobinistic ideology and the discourse of secular Arab nationalism. However, in Syria, Jacobinism increasingly degenerated into an illusion of equality, because politics in the multi-communal states are about power and wealth rather than about suitable ideologies.

With the ideology and discourse of Lebanese nationalism which emerged before the 1920s, modern Lebanon adopted syncretistic nationalism, setting out the principle of proportional representation of the religious communities as a basis for power sharing in the State. The supporters of this syncretistic nationalism believed that an independent Lebanon could unite the various discrete religious sects into one single nation. However, Lebanese syncretistic nationalism, instead of creating unity, has perpetuated the country's diversity and deepened the confessional rivalries.

The civil wars in 1958 and 1975–1990 introduced a growing convergence of interests among Lebanese politicians, historians, and political scientists: the subject of their concerns was the political system in Lebanon. The supporters of the system claim that the confessions or *tawaʾif* (sing. *taʾifa*) in Lebanon are the natural units of history and integral elements of the human experience that have entailed the formation of a political system based on confessional representation in the State's institutions. Prior to the Ta'if Agreement signed in 1989, most of the political elites and intellectuals who supported the system belonged to the Christian communities. They depicted the Lebanese political system as 'democracy of proportional representation' or 'democracy of consensus' (Harik 1972: 65–66). Even in the face of the breakdown of the Lebanese State as a result of the civil war from 1975 to 1990, they retained their convictions, arguing that the war was an outcome of external interventions and that the confessional system would function again if the Lebanese could succeed in rebuilding a strong

state that makes it more "compatible with the heterogeneous makeup of society" (el-Khazen 2000: 9–11, 396–397).

Shiʿis Between Nationalism and Confessionalism

At the end of the nineteenth century, the nationalist germ began to spread among Shiʿis, Druzes and Alawis. Writing about the Shiʿis at the end of the Ottoman era and the beginning of the Mandate period, Waddah Sharara depicts his community as a perplexed community (*umma qaliqa*). Sharara analyzes the social, political, and cultural changes in the southern part of modern Lebanon, pointing out that, historically, the Shiʿis were known under two designations. They were called *Matawila*, a word derived from the root-noun *wilaya*, which means to be loyal to Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. The designation *matawila* links them to the broader religious Shiʿi identity that Sharara calls *al-tashayuʿ* (Shiʿism). The Shiʿis were also known as *al-Amiliyya* or *al-Amiliyun*, based on their claim of ancestral descent from *Amila*, a Yemenite tribe that had immigrated into the area before the rise of Islam. The emergence of the Arab nationalist discourse induced Shiʿi intellectuals to seek theoretical ways to integrate their community within the 'nascent nation' without losing their traditional *tashayuʿ* and their tribal identity as components of their collective identity. The different designations of the Shiʿis are at the origin of the community's perplexity regarding its self-perception (Sharara 1996: 61–67).

Throughout their history, the Shiʿis had used the principle of *taqiyya*,[2] shielding their religious belief while manifesting loyalty toward the ruling Sunni majority. But the rise of Arab nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century prompted a new outlook within the growing circle of Shiʿi intellectuals. They searched for a new blueprint by which they could adapt themselves to the new nationalist ideas. Such adaptation led to what one could describe as a redefinition of the 'we-group' identity. In this process of redefinition, the intellectuals played a decisive role. They laid emphasis on different affiliations in accordance with different situations. The redefinition of the we-group identity led to a phenomenon known as *polytaxis* (*poly* many, *taxis* order) or the *polytactic* potential. As Georg Elwert illuminates: "Groups and individuals may belong to different reference groups simultaneously. According to the opportunity of situations,

[2] *Taqiyya* is usually translated into English as dissimulation. In Arabic, it means prudence and carefulness.

they may stress one or other of these affiliations as their 'real' one . . . We may call this phenomenon *polytaxis* . . . or the *polytactic potential*" (Elwert 1997: 71–72).

Since *al-nahda*, Shiʿi, Alawi and the Druze intellectuals and politicians had used their polytactic potential in their search for new ways to adapt to the era of nationalism. One might argue that the polytactic potential used by these heterodox communities is nothing but another form of *taqiyya* under new circumstances. It is beyond the scope of this article to delineate all the complex aspects of the practice of *taqiyya* among the Shiʿis, Alawis, and Druzes throughout their histories. In general, the practice of *taqiyya* is a conscious act through which Shiʿis, Alawis, and Druzes pretend to accept the faith and rituals of the Sunni dominant religion while remaining deeply attached to their own religious uniqueness. The ultimate aim of *taqiyya* has always been to maintain religious independence and avoid being assimilated through external religious dictates and persecutions. Unlike *taqiyya*, the polytactic potential is not an act of pretending, but a genuine attitude, through which intellectuals of these communities attempt to accommodate their collective identity to the wider social, cultural, ideological, and political frameworks. The polytactic potential is not unique for the Islamic heterodox communities, but a universal phenomenon characteristic for all minorities trying to find their place in a society with dominant majority.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, religious leaders were the sole stratum to codify and transmit the practice of *taqiyya* among the members of these heterodox communities. In pre-modern societies, when formal education was deficient, religious leaders assumed a pivotal role in ensuring the perpetuation of religious lore and practice that provided the axis of religious identity for successive generations. The socio-economic changes and the expansion of educational systems required a new breed of intelligentsia and leadership that can determine the framework of the relationship between their communities and the 'others'. Although religious leaders retained a hold over the affection of the illiterate lower strata, the expansion of education had put a premium on the activities of intellectuals who began to replace *taqiyya* by a new strategy of polytactic potential seen as more appropriate in the new era of nationalism. They realized that their religious communities were no longer isolated in their mountainous areas where the practice of *taqiyya* had helped them to survive and maintain their religious identities for centuries.

Because they have misconstrued *taqiyya*, many researchers still go on using the concept as a passe-partout to explain the political behavior of the Islamic heterodox communities in the past and present. To use *taqiyya* alone to account for the behavioral patterns of these communities in modern

politics would amount to an anachronistic explanation, where the past explains the present and vice versa.

The journal *al-Irfan*—established in 1909 by Ahmad Arif al-Zayn—is a good example of the polytactic potential used by the Shiʿis in an era of nationalism. Its writers looked for ways to reconcile their confessional and national identities (see Khalidi 1981: 118–123). An article published in the second issue of *al-Irfan* by Musawbi, a pen name, under the title "Law and History" exemplifies attempts to reconcile Shiʿi identity and nationalism. The author of the article deals with the relationship between *milla* (religious community) and *umma* (nation). Assuming that history retains memories and records of both, the author differentiates between 'natural civic law' and religious law. The former is dynamic and adaptable, in accordance with changes that occur within the nation, while the latter is stable and based on religious texts. This differentiation led the author to distinguish between two kinds of identity: the one attached to the *milla* and the other attached to the *umma*. The law of the *milla* refers to the personal status of marriage and inheritance, while that of the *umma* refers to the general status of the polity. The author sees the nation as a superior political entity, containing several sub-entities, in this case religious communities (*al-Irfan*, vol. 1, March 1909: 60–68; Sharara 1996: 29–31).

One year later, Ahmad Rida, one of the prominent Shiʿi intellectuals, wrote an article entitled "What is a Nation?" in *al-Irfan*. In this article, Rida seeks to define the identity of his religious community in relation to three different collectives: the Muslim [religious] *umma*, the Ottoman [civic] *umma* and the Arab [national] *umma* (*al-Irfan*, vol. 2 no. 9, November 1910: 459–462; Sharara 1996: 40). In attributing to the Shiʿis more than one component of identity, Rida provides Shiʿi intellectuals with the fundamental arguments concerning their collective identity. These became the basic tenets used by many Shiʿi intellectuals who published their ideas in *al-Irfan*.

Dealing simultaneously with different references of collective identities, *al-Irfan* reflects the polytactic potential of its writers and the ability of its Shiʿi readers to redefine their collective identity in accordance with the occasion. In addition to articles on nationalism and localism, an editorial article, in 1913, assigns another goal to the organ: "It specially focuses on Shiʿi affairs, both old and contemporary" (*al-Irfan*, vol. 5, no. 21, November 1913: 1, quoted in Sharara 1996: 12).

In December 1920 when he resumed the publication of his journal after the First World War, al-Zayn bewailed the division of "the unfortunate homeland" into several entities including Greater Lebanon. It was clear that he alluded to the colonial division of the Levant, where the Arab nationalists

had aspired to establish their nation-state (*al-Irfan*, vol. 6, no. 1–2, 1–3; Sharara 1996: 183). However, apart from the nationalist intellectuals, the majority of the Shiʿi leaders and religious scholars could not adopt a stable political stance vis-à-vis the French occupation and the territorial division of Syria and Lebanon until 1920 (Shuʿayb 1987: 87–91; Bazzi 1993: 50–104).

During the Mandate, the main clan chiefs not only went along with the confessional system of Greater Lebanon but contributed to its crystallization (Shuʿayb 1987: 72–104). However, to justify their integration and to satisfy the Shiʿi demands for equality within Greater Lebanon, the powerful leaders of these clans had now to change the outlooks of both elites and peasantry by emphasizing the interests of their community and formulating their protests against the discrimination of the Shiʿis in Lebanon. Although the intellectuals were attached to Arab nationalism and were opposed to the mandatory regime, they also had to accommodate their nationalist discourse to include the Shiʿi grievances. In order to compete with the discourse of the confessional leaders, the intellectuals of *al-Irfan* began to link local grievances with the Arab nationalist demands for unity between Syria and Lebanon (Shuʿayb 1987: 93; *al-Irfan*, vol. 16, no. 2, September 1928: 122–124). The Arab nationalist discourse of *al-Irfan* endowed the Shiʿi literati with a new consciousness that the French authorities in Lebanon attempted to preclude through great efforts at separating Shiʿi affairs from those of the Sunnis (Rondot 1947: vol. 1. 66). In the 1930s, a new generation of Shiʿi Arab nationalists emerged. Their opposition to the French Mandate was stronger than that of the first generation, and they spoke the same political language as the Sunni nationalists. Meanwhile, they combined their confessional demands for civic equality in the Lebanese state with their nationalist discourse (Shuʿayb 1987: 119–120).

By presenting the Shiʿi grievances and demands for equality in Lebanon, both the nationalist and confessionalist Shiʿis coined the term *matlabiyya* (a word derived from the root-noun *matlab*, a demand). Since the Mandate, matlabiyya has become the core of the political discourse of the Shiʿi intellectuals and political leaders, being embraced by both nationalists and confessionalists. In this sense, matlabiyya presents another example of the polytactic potential of the intellectuals and political leaders to adapt to the era of nationalism and nation-state. Although the approval of the Franco-Lebanese Treaty of 1936[3] resulted in muting the demands for Syrian unity

[3] The Franco-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship and Alliance of 1936 redefined the relationship between the French Mandate and the state of Lebanon. According to this Treaty, the

among the Muslim leaders, including the Shiʿis (Shuʿayb 1987: 162–163), the matlabiyya confessional discourse, since this treaty until today, has become an important component in Shiʿi collective identity. Shiʿi confessional leaders and nationalist intellectuals have relied on matlabiyya to propagate their respective ideas among their coreligionists.

Following the first and second generations of intellectuals, the modern Shiʿis would stress one component of their identity and omit another in accordance with different situations. Since the independence of Lebanon, one can discern several components of this collective identity: local communalism with its matlabiyya character, Shiʿism, Lebanese patriotism (*wataniyya*), Arab nationalism (*qawmiyya*), and Islamism. These components have been internalized and have come to characterize the polytactic potential of Shiʿi collective identity. Leaders of the active confessional organizations of the Amal and the Hizbollah movements continue to address their Shiʿi interlocutors with discourses similar to those of the first generation intellectuals. Thus, polytactic potential has become an inherent component of their identity, enabling Lebanese Shiʿis to play a leading role in Arab and Lebanese politics.

Although since 1980 the Shiʿis have constituted more than 30 percent of the total population of Lebanon (Johnson 2001: 3), they still behave as a minority. Neither their demographic size nor their political power can bring about a radical change in the confessional political system of the country. The 1975–1990 civil war and the recent clashes between Shiʿis and Sunnis in 2008 testify to the impossibility of introducing radical changes in a political system based on 'virtual' demography. Their main political organizations, Amal and Hizbollah, abstained from changing the existing political system that hinges on confessional distribution of the political power and, in the absence of a new census since 1932, on 'virtual' demography. Because Christian and Muslim elites could not agree to conduct a new census, the ratio of 6:5 decided upon in 1943 continued to be the basis for distributing the parliamentary seats until the Ta'if Agreement that changed this ratio to 5:5.

The emergence of Amal in 1976 and Hizbollah in 1982–3 was a result of socio-economic and political processes that have eroded the traditional and obsolete Shiʿi elites. These processes began in the 1950s and became

French government obliges itself to defend the integrity of the Lebanese territory. The Treaty of 1936 appends two annexes that guarantee equality of all citizens and ensures an equitable representation of the different religious communities in the state institutions.

stronger in the 1960s and 1970s through the activities of Musa al-Sadr (1928–1978), who became the paramount leader of the community in the 1960s. His first significant acts were to establish a series of vocational institutes. In 1967, al-Sadr promoted a parliamentary legislation to establish, two years later, the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council as an independent body from the Supreme Islamic Council of the Sunnis. In 1974, he founded *Harakat al-Mahrumin* (the Movement of the Deprived) that exhorted Shiʿis not to accept their deprivation fatalistically. The growing influence of al-Sadr prior to the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 gave direction to the political awakening of the Shiʿis, embodied by the rise of Amal. In the early 1980s, a coterie of radical clerics among Amal's supporters disapproved of what they saw as the Amal leaders' tactic of seeking a *modus vivendi* with the 'corrupt' political system of Lebanon and even with the Israeli occupation. With the assistance of Iran in 1982, this coterie made up the cadre of Hizbollah (God's party). Hizballah's fierce ideological tenor and commitment to confront Israel's occupation in the south attracted many Shiʿis. By eroding Amal's influence among the Shiʿis, at the end of the 1980s Hizbollah became one of the leading parties of the country. Although it has served—at least until 1989—as a stalking horse for Iranian interests, Hizbollah has proved responsive to the Shiʿi aspirations of their domestic constituency (Norton 2007: 13–46).

The rise of Hassan Nasrallah as the secretary-general of the party in 1992 inaugurated two parallel and interrelated changes in Hizbollah's political stance. The party decided to abandon its previous denunciation of the 'corrupt' confessional system and take part in the elections of 1992. By battling the economic 'exploitation' of the Shiʿis and by retaining a fierce confrontation of the Israeli occupation in south Lebanon, Hizbollah succeeded in broadening a mass political mobilization among the Shiʿis. Although attached to its religious convictions, Hizbollah adopted a strategy which does not dwell only on religious themes, but opens the doors for non-religious Shiʿi middleclass to take part in its politics. Thus many Shiʿis who did not yearn to accept its religious and ideological passions have embraced its radical appeal, converting it to a Janus-faced organization (Norton 2007: 45–46, 98–103).

The strategy adopted since 1992 is reflected in Nasrallah's and other leaders' speeches, which merge a religious discourse with a mundane one. A good example is their speeches in the ʿAshura commemorations which have been converted by Hizbollah into opportunities for mass political mobilization. The ʿAshura (derived from the Arabic word for tenth) commemorates the mourning of the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet,

Husayn Ibn Ali, killed and mutilated by the Sunni ruler of Iraq in the tenth day of Muharram in the year 61 of the Muslim calendar (10 October 680 CE). In pre-modern time, Shiʿis used to avoid publicly commemorating the ʿAshura. But, in 1938 when nationalism and Islamic reformism removed their sense of prudence, Shiʿis abandoned *taqiyya*, inaugurating the modern public commemoration of ʿAshura, which since the 1960s has become a symbol of their religious and political awakening, and a manifestation of power in Lebanon (Norton 2007: 51–68).

We find a striking illustration of this change in the televised speeches which have two parts, religious and political, made by Nasrallah during the Ashura commemorations. In the religious part, he emphasizes the 'uniqueness' of the Shiʿis as equal partners with the Sunnis in the Islamic *umma*; in a speech on Shiʿi religious values, Nasrallah openly refers to several specific religious ceremonies and tenets without shielding them behind the old *taqiyya*. The political part of Nasrallah's speeches recalls the polytactic potential adopted by the Shiʿis since *al-Nahda* when he routinely castigates the 'enemies' of the Arab and Muslim *umma*s, stressing the loyalty of his community to Arab nationalism and Lebanese patriotism.[4] The recent 'Document of Hizbolla' dated 30 November 2009 is a cogent exposition of the polytactic potential strategy through which Hizballah pragmatically confronts the shifting political landscape of regional politics in the Middle East, as well as the changing terrain of Lebanese politics after 2005. Although it stresses the necessity of abolishing the Lebanese confessional system in order to achieve a 'just democracy' in Lebanon, the document avers:

> Until the time the Lebanese, through their national dialogue, reach the historical and sensitive goal, i.e. the abolition of political confessionalism, the democracy of consensus will remain the basis of governance in Lebanon, because it is the real embodiment of the Constitution and the Pact of the coexistence (Document of Hizbolla, 30 November 2009).

While dealing with the role of Hizbollah in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its relationship with the Arab countries and the Iranian Revolution, this document reiterates three pillars which still hold Shiʿi identity and self-perception, i.e. Lebanese patriotism, Arab nationalism, and Islamism (Hizbolla Document: Website of *Muntada Rabitat al-Tullab al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*).

[4] Hassan Nasralla's speeches are available in many internet sites under the Arabic title: *Khitabat al-Sayd Hasan Nasralla*.

The Druze Response to the Nationalist Message

The Druze religious faith is an offshoot of the Shiʿi-Ismaʿili doctrine developed during the tenth century, when the Ismaʿilis established the Fatimid State in Tunisia and subsequently conquered Egypt in 969. The Fatimid rulers called themselves *khalifa*s and soon claimed to be *imam*s. The Ismaʿili *daʿwa* (religious mission) endowed the Fatimid's rulers, the *khalifa*s-*imam*s, with heavenly powers, and introduced the notion that they are messianic candidates. During the reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (996–1021), the *imam-khalifa* of the Fatimid dynasty, a group of scholars, eager to see the messianic promise fulfilled, began from 1017 to propagate their own *daʿwa*, which they themselves called *daʿwat al-tawhid* (mission of Unitarianism), and which outsiders called al-Durziyya (Druzism). They claimed that al-Hakim was of divine nature. It is at this rupture point that tradition locates the origin of the Druze religious sect. Druzism claimed that *lahut* (Divinity) had manifested itself in al-Hakim under human form (*nasut*), because human beings cannot escape their physical nature and their comprehension is bound by space and time. God can be understood only within the limits of human comprehension by *nasut*. The *nasut* is not *tajasud* (an incarnation) of God, but an image through which He brings Himself closer to human understanding (Firro 1992: 7–12). The Druze Canon puts a strong emphasis on the Unitarian concept, warning against taking the *nasut* image for the Deity itself because "God is unique, eternal, without a beginning, and abiding without end. He is beyond the comprehension of human understanding and cannot be defined by words or attributes distinct from His essence. He has no body or spirit" (Epistle 13, *Druze Canon*).

According to the Druze faith, God created all human souls and bodies at once, their number is fixed for all times. A soul cannot exist outside a human body, which serves as the vestment (*qamis*) of the soul. Through transmigration of their souls, the 'true believers' accepted the Unitarian *daʿwa*, and they will be able to free themselves from their shortcomings and reach a 'state of completion' (*al-kamal al-akhir*). Because the 'true believers' apply their hearts and minds in deep devotion to God, they are exempt from the performance of the Islamic *daʿaʾim* (pillars). Instead, the Druze faith substituted seven Unitarian principles (Firro 1992: 13).

The influence of Islamic *sufi*sm comes to the fore in the many *sufi* principles to which the Druze sheikhs adhere in their overall *maslak* (behavior). These sheikhs form the *uqqal* (the initiated or wise men and women), who have full access to the Druze Canon. The others, the *juhhal* (uninitiated or ignorant) have no permission to access the Druze Canon, receiving only

oral religious instruction until they decide to join the initiated group. Keeping faith in secrecy led the members of the community to practice the Shiʿi principle of *taqiyya*. However, *taqiyya* could not convince many Sunni scholars that they were faithful Muslims. Therefore, many of these scholars follow Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwa* from the beginning of the fourteenth century that declared the Druzes and the Alawis as heretics outside Islam (Ibn Taymiyya 1998: vol. 18, 98–99).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Druze intellectuals from Mt. Lebanon embraced the Arab nationalist discourse. Shakib Arsalan (1869–1946) was among the first who attempted to articulate the fundamental arguments in order to integrate the community within the Muslim and Arab *umma*. His mother was a Muslin Sunni who probably had a strong influence upon her son's ideas. Until the end of the Ottoman period, Arslan kept up his contacts with many scholars among the Islamic reformers and Arab nationalists. It was within this cultural context that Shakib Arslan elaborated his Islamic and Arabist discourse and ideology (al-Mawla 1990: 28–30, 53–54).

The study of his extensive writings and his political activities show that his Pan-Islamic and Arab nationalist notions were genuine and not a manifestation of *taqiyya*. Until his death in 1946, Arslan had preached a blend of Islamic reformism and Arab nationalism that had a strong appeal for many Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims, and even for most of the Druze literati in Mt. Lebanon. The Druze revolt of 1925 in Mt. Hawran against the Mandate and its connection with the Syrian Arab nationalists, prompted Arslan to reiterate his previous arguments regarding the Druzes' Arab identity. He focused exclusively on the Druze racial origin and on the Islamic characteristics of the Druze community. While Arslan emphasizes the pure Arab origin of the Druzes, he claims that Druzism is a branch of Islam, notably Shiʿi-Ismaʿilism. When dealing with the Druze faith, it was enough for Arslan to point out that the principles of the Druze doctrine are similar to those of many *sufi* Muslims. Like the *sufi*s, the Druzes' esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an led them to call for 'the unity of the cosmos'. Probably in an effort to make his arguments appear more convincing, he deliberately avoids dealing with the Druze doctrine's abolition of the pillars of Islam. Without referring directly to the Muslim pillars, Arslan claims that the Druzes fulfill all the Islamic duties (al-Mawla 1990: 75–77).

At the end of the nineteenth century, other Druze intellectuals emerged to adopt ideas similar to those of Arslan. Among these was Ali Ibn Yusuf Ibn Nasir al-Din, who directed the school of al-Dauudiya for ten years; the school was established in Mt. Lebanon in 1862 by Dauud Pasha, the governor

of Mt. Lebanon. In 1886 Nasir al-Din founded a journal in Beirut called *al-Safaʾ* (Clearness). The journal appeared for several months, stopped, and was reestablished in 1898 by his son Amin Nasir al-Din (al-Bʿayni 1984: 95). Like the first generation of their Shiʿi peers who wrote in al-*Irfan*, Druze intellectuals who studied in al-Dauudiya and wrote in *al-Safaʾ* had formulated arguments that would integrate the Druze community within the Muslim *umma* and Arab nation.

Two new schools of thought had emerged among the second generation of Druze intellectuals. The former sought to define Druzes as part of the Arab nation, while insisting on the community's special character. The latter, represented by a smaller group, called for the revival of Muslim unity, including the 'heterodox' communities within a single Muslim *umma*. Abdalla al-Najjar (1896–1976) was one of the leading figures belonging to the first school. In 1924 al-Najjar published *Banu Maʿruf fi Jabal Hawran*, (The Druzes in Mt. Hawran), the first book ever to cover the religious and historical aspects of his community. The first chapter contains reflections about the relationship between *umma* (nation) and *milla* (religious community); these are reminiscent of similar reflections by Shiʿi intellectuals of the same period. Al-Najjar distinguishes between *al-milla* as a religious group and *al-umma* as a national collective. He argues that Islam comprises several *milla*s (religious sects), each with its special characteristics, such as the Druze *milla* whose members are of Arab descent. Al-Najjar presents the main religious issues that differentiate the Druzes from other Muslims. He emphasizes that these issues are esoteric interpretations of Islamic dogmas and not a total deviation from Islam (al-Najjar 1924: 14–15, 18–19, 43–52, 108–109).

Hani Abu Muslih (1893–1971), Ajaj Nuwayhid (1896–1982), and Fu'ad Slim were the prominent representatives of the second group, not only in their verbal discourse, but also in their actions and in their personal behaviour that exemplified assimilation within the orthodox Muslim *umma* (al-Hut 1982: 861–863, 867–871: Nuwayhid 1993: 12–27). Thus, they even showed tolerance towards the marriage of their sisters and daughters with Sunnis. The writings of Nuwayhid still have great influence on Druze literati today. Although he devoted his political activities and most of his writings to the Palestinian cause and to general Arab-Islamic issues, he also published in 1935 a book on the Druze historians and religious scholars who lived before the seventeenth century. Nuwayhid merged his analysis and narrative with the Arab nationalist-Islamic discourse, placing Druze historians and scholars in the mainstream of Islamic heritage (Nuwayhid 1975).

The activities of Ali Nasir al-Din (1888–1974) and Saʿid Taqiy al-Din (1904–1960), two Druze intellectuals from the second generation, illustrate the recourse to polytactic potential instead of the old *taqiyya*. Motivated by deep devotion to Arab nationalism, Nasir al-Din joined several Arab nationalists from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq to hold an Arab nationalist congress in August 1933 in the Druze village of Qrnayil in Mt. Lebanon. The participants decided to organize *Usbat al-Amal al-Qawmi* (the League for National Action). Not only was Nasir al-Din the secretary of the Lebanese section of the League, he was also one of the League's ideologues who formulated its goals and ideology. Recent studies consider Nasir al-Din as a central figure, whose ideas had great impact on the Arab nationalist parties that emerged after 1946. His book *Qadiyat al-Arab* (The Arab Cause), published in 1946, presents a synthesis of his ideas which have been adopted by *Harakat al-Qawmiyin al-Arab* (The Movement of Arab Nationalists) and the Baʿth Party (Nasir al-Din 1946, rpt. 1963; Badran 1996: 74–110; Busʿid 2004: 56–70; Shlash 2004: 45; al-Tall 1996: 77–100; Saghiyya 2000: 165–188). Taking their cue from Nasir al-Din, many Druze elites and intellectuals in Lebanon and Syria supported Arab nationalist organizations as a vehicle for integration in the political arenas of the two countries, applying their polytactic potential through which they adapted Druze identity to pan-Arab nationalism.

Saʿid Taqiy al-Din provides another clear example for this Druze polytactic potential. He followed his uncle Amin (1884–1927) who, since 1907, had been a member of the circle of Christian Lebanese intellectuals, who called for Lebanese nationalism. Both conceived of *al-uruba* (Arabism) as a revival and development of Arab culture based on the Arabic language (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 43). Saʿid's political and social ideas illustrate his views concerning the various components of the Druze collective identity: Druze communalism, Arab Nationalism, Syrian nationalism and Lebanese patriotism (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 26–31, 92–93).

Even when Saʿid joined the SSNP of Antun Saʿada in 1949, he argued that his support for the party does not mean that he changed his position toward Greater Lebanon, Greater Syria, and *uruba* (Arabism). In one of his talks, he declared: "I am Lebanese, therefore I am an Arab. Consequently, it is imperative to unite [Greater Syria] into one integral political entity" (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 94). He supported the party, he said, because it was the only one that called for a genuine separation between religion and politics (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 73–81, 95–98).

Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, the socio-economic and cultural development in Syria and Lebanon has exposed Druzes to the outside world and has eroded many traditional elements of their society. No longer isolated in their mountainous localities, many Druze *juhhal* have faced difficulties in getting information about their faith from the *uqqal*. Because the *juhhal*, who constitute the majority of the community, have no direct access to their secret religious literature, their main resort is to rely on secondary sources of the Druze intellectuals. It is, therefore, no wonder to find many Druzes adopting the nationalist discourse of their intellectuals and joining Arab nationalist parties that advocate secular nationalisms. The historical record since 1925 indicates that most of the Druzes have accepted the arguments of their intellectuals regarding the collective identity of the community.

Although their community is a tiny minority in Syria (3 percent), in 1963 Druze officers in the army joined their Ismaʿili and Alawi peers in establishing a new political elite in the country. However, as a result of an abortive Druze *coup d'état* in 1966, the Druzes found themselves excluded from this new elite and joined other minorities in supporting the present Syrian regime. By using the Jacobinistic national discourse, as well as polytactic potential strategy, Druzes have attempted to secure slices of power.

Unlike in Syria, the Druzes in Lebanon have played an important role in the politics of the country. The main vehicle for this role is the PSP (Progressive Socialist Party) established in 1949 by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt (1919–1977) on the basis of the modern ideologies of socialism, liberal democracy and Arab nationalism. From the 1950s until the late 1970s, the PSP led all the leftist and Arab nationalist parties that opposed the dominance of the ruling elites and the 'corrupt confessional system' in Lebanon. Jumblatt's collected works expound his ideology of Arab nationalism and political thought that recalls many ideas of Shakib Arslan, Ali Nasir al-Din, and other Druze intellectuals who have abandoned *taqiyya* and adopted polytactic potential (Jumblatt 1987). In his reassessment of the *taqiyya*'s role in the Druzes' history, Jumblatt explicitly rejects its interpretation as an act of prudence, arguing that *taqiyya* was an inherent characteristic of the 'Gnostic tradition' to which the Druze faith belongs (Makarem 1966: 7–16).

Although the death of Kamal Jumblatt in 1977 and the confessional strife in the 1980s have eroded the influence of the PSP among non-Druze communities, Walid Jumblatt, the son of Kamal, seeks to cultivate the legacy of his father and maintain the Druze minority's influence on Lebanese national politics.

Nationalism as the Road to Power: The Alawis in Syria

As in the case of Druzes, the historical record of Alawis-Nusayris shows that *taqiyya* was never an absolute guarantee against hostile treatment. Sunni Muslim scholars and chroniclers placed this minority beyond the pale of the formal Shiʿi doctrine. Supported by his extremist followers, Ibn Nusayr (d. 883), the founder of the sect, related himself to the twelfth Shiʿi *imam* as his *bab* (door), through which his followers among the Shiʿis can reach the inner meaning of *al-imamiyya* (the guidance) of the true faith. By adding the central role of *al-bab* to Shiʿism, the Nusayris claim that their *abwab* (sing. *bab*) were the representatives of the 'true faith' (Massignon 1934). According to them, every Shiʿi *imam* had a *bab* on whom the Shiʿis rely to understand the 'true faith'. Ibn Nusayr was the *bab* of the last and twelfth imam who had gone into cosmic *ghayba* (concealment) (al-Tawil 1981: 253–256; Uthman 1994: 44–45).

The Nusayris had added another sense to the term *bab* when they placed it within the Trinitarian concept of their faith. They based the concept on the three figures of Ali, Muhammad, and Salman, abbreviated by the letters *A.M.*S. (Bar-Asher and Kofsky 2002: 7–41). Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, represents *al-maʿna* (the meaning) of the divinity. Muhammad, the Prophet represents *al-ism* (the name) and Salman al-Farisi, one of the prophet's *Sahaba* (Companions) represents *al-bab* (the door). In his interpretation of the Trinitarian concept, Abu Musa al-Hariri (a pseudonym of Butrus al-Qazi) argues that the Prophet Muhammad is no more than an envelop of *al-maʿna*, as a *hijab* (veil) or as a *bayt* (house). In this sense, *al-maʿna* (the meaning) is *al-batin* (the internal) of the divinity that resides within *al-zahir* (the external) in the form of a *bayt* (house) and a *hijab* (veil) that contains the inner meaning. To enter this 'house' one needs a *bab* which is embodied by Salman al-Farisi, through whom believers obtain access to the inner meaning of the divinity (al-Hariri 1984: 24–36). Modern Alawi authors reject this interpretation, claiming that *A.M.S.* is connected with the symbols of letters practiced by the Muslim *sufis* (Uthman 1994: 193–198).

Most of the studies on Nusayris since the nineteenth century focused on the Trinitarian concept of *A.M.S.* Some of these assign great weight to the Christian influence expressed through the concept, to such an extent that some of these studies speculate that the roots of Nusayriyya go back to Christianity (Lammens 1901: 33–50). However, the recent revisionist studies on Nusayriyya reject the 'Christian connection' and relate the Nusayri trinity to the Shiʿi legacy (Friedman: 2009).

Unlike the case of the Druzes and the Shiʿis, the first generation of intellectuals among the Alawis-Nusayris emerged only on the eve of the mandatory period when they began to name their sect Alawiyya, instead of Nusayriyya (al-Tawil 1981: 448–449). When the new name appeared, educated Alawis began to formulate historical and religious arguments in accordance with the new name. Thus, this name and its religious implications became the subject of a series of six articles entitled "What History has Neglected: The Alawis or the Nusayris", written by Isa Saʿud, a prominent Alawi sheikh, and published in the Alawi organ of *al-Amani* in Latakia in 1930 and 1931. Distinguishing between the old name and the new one, Saʿud claims that the Alawis are an authentic Shiʿi sect and their name Alawiyya stems from the great love of its members towards Ali. While he emphasizes the new name, Saʿud alludes to the fact that the name Nusayriyya would revive suspicions among many Muslims (*al-Amani*, November 1930 to May 1931; the full texts of these six articles in al-Ibrahim 1999: 265–280).

Although such suspicions remain, since the Mandate certain Syrian Sunni writers began to adopt the new name, accepting part of the Alawi arguments concerning their faith (Ali 1983, vol. 6: 260–263; al-Sharif 1994). The religious arguments of the Alawis in *al-Amani* had encouraged Shiʿi intellectuals in Lebanon to write about the close relationship of the Alawiyya with the Imamate Shiʿis (*al-Irfan*, vol. 20, no. 5 December 1930, quoted in Uthman 1994: 11–12). In addition to *al-Amani*, in 1937 educated Alawis established another journal, *al-Nahda* (the Awakening). Conscious of the importance of religion for promoting nationalism, al-*Nahda* invited Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Khayr, one of the Alawi *ulama*, to contribute to the new journal. Under the title: "The Awakening of the Alawi Muslims", al-Khayr wrote a series of five articles published in the first issues of *al-Nahda.* In the first article: "Who are the Alawis?" al-Khayr defines the community as 'Imamate Muslims and pure Arabs'. Referring to the non-Muslim and alien rituals of the Alawis, he argues that these rituals were adopted by their populace without the acceptance of their religious elites (the texts in al-Ibrahim 1999: 381–397).

By adding the appellation of 'Muslims' in his title, al-Khayr presented the historical and religious arguments that relate the tenets of the community to the Imamate Shiʿis. One month after the publication of this special issue in *al-Nahda*, the most powerful chiefs of the Alawis, including the notorious separatist Salman (Sulayman) al-Murshid, accepted al-Khayr's arguments and signed a memo declaring their attachment to the Jaʿfari Shiʿi doctrine and to Islam (Uthman 1994: 93).

Until his death in 1986, al-Khayr continued to elaborate his religious arguments that had become the fundamental basis for Alawi writers.

Ten years after his death, his followers collected some of his writings and published them in a special book bearing his name. While the phrase "The Alawi Muslims" was used in the title of his 1937 articles, the collective name 'Alawis' adopted since 1922 was absent from the title of 1996 volume. Thus, the term Alawiyya was replaced with Jaʿfariyya, i.e. Imamate Shiʿa (al-Khayr: 1996). In order to transform Alawiyya into Jaʿfariyya, al-Khayr gives a summary of the main tenets and then presents several declarations, petitions and *fatwa*s of Alawi *ulama* to attest their attachment to the Shiʿi creed. He also refers to 'the mistakes' of western scholars who wrote about his community (al-Khayr: 1996: 37–51). The publishers of the volume in 1996 provide a list of 76 books and articles by al-Khayr on religious and nationalist subjects which place the Alawiyya within the Jaʿfariyya as well as within Arab nationalism (al-Khayr: 1996: 103–117).

During the 1960s, when sectarianism, regionalism, and factionalism were evoked in the political arena for the power struggle in Syria, al-Khayr chose to republish the book of Muhammad Ghalib al-Tawil, *History of the Alawis*, which was first published in 1924. Al-Khayr himself reedited the book, adjusting it to the new political constellation of the 1960s and to his religious interpretations. Through his long detailed annotations and introduction, al-Khayr portrays the Alawis as a genuine Muslim sect and a pure Arab community whose principal tribes had migrated from Arabia into Syria. A special annotation was dedicated to the overlapping between Alawi and Imamate Shiʿi doctrines. Because al-Tawil's book and al-Khayr's comments establish new historical and religious arguments useful for contemporary Alawis, the volume was republished in four editions between 1966 and 1981 (al-Tawil 1981: 5–64).

Most of the recent Alawi books that focus on religious matters take their cue from the ideas formulated by al-Khayr and are prefaced with introductions written by famous contemporary Shiʿi religious scholars. These introductions emphasize the Jaʿfari characteristics of the Alawi tenets. It is worthwhile noting that these books quote several *fatwa*s and declarations by Sunnis and Shiʿis that legitimize the Alawi sect as a Muslim one (the introductions of al-Ibrahim 1995, and Abbas 2000).

However, in order to maximize their influence within the state, since 1946 Alawi intellectuals and politicians preferred to support two models of nationalisms: the Arab or Syrian model in which nationalism is separated from religion, and the other model in which Islam is considered as the main component of the Arab nation. Under the rule of the army and the Baʿth party, which purged tribalism, particularism, and confessionalism from the political discourse, the road was opened for Alawis to enter the political arena under their redefined communal identity. At the socio-political

level, the Baʿth ʻs *coups d'état* between 1963 and 1970 enabled officers from minority groups and Sunnis of rural areas to replace the urban and elite establishment. Ideas that had been developed during the Mandate by the first Alawi intellectuals had facilitated the integration of the Alawi intelligentsia and leadership into Syria's political life. The role of these Alawis in the internal political affairs of the community grew stronger while the national ideologies and discourse were being widely spread through the printed word and the educational system. Although the Alawi officers in the Syrian army and political leaders embraced Arab nationalism and its Jacobinistic discourse, Sunni Muslims have looked upon the Alawis with suspicion, and ethnic tensions have existed. On several occasions, such as in 1976 and 1982, confessional conflicts between Sunnis and Alawis have threatened the political stability of the country.

To de-politicize this confessional cleavage, the Syrian regime of Hafez and Bashar al-Asad uses different means, such as creating coalitions with the Sunni religious scholars and partially renewing the intermediary roles of rural and tribal chiefs. The regime has also thrown wide open the doors to state bureaucracy. The only condition is that people are loyal to the regime and to its national ideology and discourse; which confessional background they have is irrelevant. The question remains however: can the nationalist ideology and discourse and the Alawi adoption of Shiʿi Islam lead the Alawis toward full integration within Islam and the Arab Syrian nation when nationalism and similar universal ideologies are eroded by the rise of Sunni Islamist movements?

Conclusion

Summing up the analysis, we can say that the polytactic potential was a successful strategy to empower Shiʿis, Druzes, and Alawis as long as nationalism, state patriotism and moderate Sunni Islamism prevailed in the political arena of the Middle East. However the recent Shiʿi-Sunni strife and the reemergence of extremist Sunni 'Islamist-fundamentalism'[5] in many parts of the Middle East will arguably harm the strategy of the polytactic potential. Since 2003, the Shiʿi-Sunni strife coupled with the infiltration of extremist

[5] In Arabic there are two terms, *salafiyya* and *usuliyya* that mean the return to the Islamic fundamentals. However, using *salafiyya* or *usuliyya* would confuse the reader because *salafiyya* and *usuliyya* comprise many different schools of thought, some moderate, others radical.

Sunni organizations in Lebanon and Syria has alarmed Shiʿi, Druze, and Alawi leaders. New Sunni *daʿi*s (religious propagators)—brimming with Sunni extremist passion—have become familiar figures on the political scene of the Lebanese cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and in Sunni villages in the Akkar and the Biqa, along the border between Syria and Lebanon. These *daʿi*s are very active at propagating Sunni Islamic 'values', attracting many Sunnis affiliated with militant Islamist groups, thus posing new threats to the political order in the two countries. Since 2005, the Lebanese media have quoted statements by Shiʿi, Druze, and Alawi leaders urging the authorities to challenge the 'dangerous militant Sunni discourses' that seek to incite communal strife in Lebanon and Syria, similar to those in Iraq. In this sense, what is happening elsewhere in the Middle East can have serious repercussions on the Syrian and Lebanese political arenas.

Some Western and Arab scholars use 'Islamic fundamentalism' to describe radical Shiʿi groups; this is an unfortunate misuse of the term. In his study *Islam, the People and the State*, Sami Zubaida (1993) is critical to such misuse, and argues convincingly that there is a difference between Sunni fundamentalism and Shiʿi radicalism. The former rejects the modern state and the ideology of nationalism in favour of a universal project based on one Islamic *umma* and state. It aspires to rebuild 'the essence' of Islam embodied in the rule of the Prophet and his Companions. The latter does not seek the same 'inherent essence' of Islam to rebuild the Islamic original State, but simply to awaken the people from their 'slumber' to play a greater role in the politics of the modern State. According to Zubaida, the evolution of Iran since the Revolution, followed by Shiʿi militant activism in Lebanon, has lent credence to the difference between Sunni Islamist-fundamentalism and Shiʿi radicalism (Zubaida 1993: 18, 23–32, 53–56).

A cogent exposition of the Islamist-fundamentalist notion of *al-umma* in Syria and Lebanon is contained in the theoretical work of Saʿid Hawa (1935–1989), a prominent Syrian Islamist scholar whose ideas continue to inspire many Islamist-fundamentalists in Syria and Lebanon. Dealing with *qawmiyya* (nationalism) and *wataniyya* (patriotism), Hawa argues that Muslims have no collective identity other than Islam, even though they belong to different tribes and linguistic groups. For him, only non-Muslims make their attachment to homelands, ethnic groups, and races the basis of their dominant identities (Hawa 1970: 70–71). Hawa claims that the Islamic message had changed the course of human history when it replaced what he anachronistically calls *al-itar al-qawmi* (the national framework) with the wider cosmopolitan framework of the indivisible Islamic *umma* (Hawa 1970: 111–1112).

To face the new Sunni Islamist trend, Shiʿis, Druzes, and Alawis have no alternative but to resort to their polytactic potential because they have already uncovered their specific religious tenets and abandoned *taqiyya*. Thus, they continue to advocate their attachment to secular Arab, or Arab-cum-Islamic, nationalism, and insist on the pluralist characteristic of Islam.

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